# BREAKING THE GENDER STEREOTYPES: A FEMINIST READING OF *THE GREAT INDIAN KITCHEN* AND *KAATHAL- THE CORE*

Project report submitted in the partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of degree of Masters of Arts in English Language and Literature of Farook College (Autonomous)

Affiliated to the University of Calicut

By


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# DECLARATION

I, FIDA SAFARY hereby declare that the project report entitled **"BREAKING THE GENDER STEREOTYPES: A FEMINIST READING OF *THE GREAT INDIAN KITCHEN* AND *KAATHAL- THE CORE"*** is a record of the bona fide project carried out by me and that no part of it has previously formed the basis of any degree, diploma or any other similar title.

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# CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the project entitled **"BREAKING THE GENDER STEREOTYPES: A FEMINIST READING OF *THE GREAT INDIAN KITCHEN* AND *KAATHAL- THE CORE***" submitted by FIDA SAFARY to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment for the award of the Degree of the Masters of Arts in English Language and Literature is a record of the bona fide research carried out by her under my supervision. No part of this project has been submitted before for the award of any degree or diploma or any other similar title.

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# INTRODUCTION

Film is a medium for artistic expression. It carries out the duties of mass media. like knowledge, instruction, amusement, and cultural transmission. Because of their widespread appeal and audiovisual format, films have enormous social influence. As a result, they have the capacity to be a significant force for social change as well as a medium for information, entertainment, and education. Movies are well-liked because they provide amusement. Similar to reading books, watching movies is one of the few ways to get a sense of the wider picture of life. A movie's script is designed to highlight or reveal particular facets of life.

One can get more adaptable about many aspects of life by watching movies. As a leisure activity, watching movies is a great method to both amuse yourself and relax your body. Learning fundamental life principles like cooperation, dedication, and consistency can also be facilitated by watching movies. Watching movies, which are collaborative works, teaches us that teamwork is always the key to long-term success. We can better appreciate and comprehend the differences in the customs, cultures, and faiths of different people and locations by watching movies. Anything that offers benefits is invariably accompanied by drawbacks. The depictions of violence in movies have a way of molding moviegoers, particularly young ones who are in their teens. This has been more common recently as more and more filmmakers seem to be creating violent themes or plots in their films in an attempt to boost output. People can receive mixed messages from watching movies since some events and situations are either overvalued or underestimated in the films. Movies that don't promote one sentiment over another are hard to come by since society constantly values or minimizes one component of itself at the expense of the other. One such significant and noteworthy drawback of movies is the gender stereotyping that is displayed by them.This needs to be thoroughly investigated and removed from movies because it is now accepted as the standard. Since movies play a major role in the formation of one's opinions and ideas, gender stereotyping in them can have negative effects on societal balance and equality. Mollywood is still involved in this. Gender stereotyping is a common feature in Malayalam films.

Gender stereotyping is the overgeneralisation of features, abilities and differences of certain group based on their gender. Gender stereotypes create widely accepted norms that each gender and associated behaviours are binary. Under this assumption, if a man or woman behave differently from what they are expected to do, creates a disconnect in spectator's mind. The society is behind the question 'What gender means' and the ardent believers of the binary idea of gender have a very difficult time moving after the individuals who do not fit into both this binary gender category, or do not identify with any gender at all. For example, assertive women are often called 'whores' and 'bitches'.Stereotypes based on gender can lead to confusion in our perceptions, which is why they are dangerous. When people don't fit into our gender preconceptions, it might result in discrimination against them and unfair treatment of them if they choose to challenge preconceived notions about their gender. In its most fundamental form, sexism is when gender disparity arises in the context of gender stereotyping. Gender stereotypes have the potential to impede the growth of an individual's innate skills and aptitudes, as well as their access to school, employment, and other opportunities in life for both men and women. Deeply rooted attitudes, values, conventions, and prejudices against women are the source of and a result of stereotypes about women. They serve to uphold and justify the historical hierarchies of power between men and women as well as the sexist beliefs that impede the advancement of women.
Gender stereotypes persist and are disseminated through the media, as well as social, educational, and recreational socialization, all of which encourage discrimination and prejudice based on gender.

Kerala, a state with a higher standard of social development, has also released some contradictory information about domestic abuse and gender sensitivity. One such conflicting indicator is the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), which was conducted recently. According to the NFHS data, 69% of housewives in the state support the domestic violence they experience. According to one of the state's top newspapers, Mathrubhumi, the percentage of people who promote domestic violence has gone up from the NFHS 3 results that were released ten years ago. The last study in Kerala showed that 66% of women and 54% of men supported domestic violence. Strong gender norms and extreme patriarchy characterize Kerala society. Strong

gender norms and a profoundly patriarchal social environment hinder women's freedom, mobility, and independence in Kerala. By examining the female labour force participation rate in Kerala, we may conclude that although women in Kerala have higher living standards than women in other parts of the nation, their involvement in economic activities is remarkably low. Meena T Pillai (2017) makes the case that, despite Kerala having a higher literacy rate, the prevailing misogyny in the state's film industry and the deeply ingrained patriarchal elements in the state's social structure contribute significantly to the misogynistic work environment in the state's industries, administrative, and educational sectors. She believes that misogyny has become deeply ingrained. According to her, the "religious, social, cultural, and political unconscious of the state" is deeply ingrained with misogyny. The state's cultural industry, particularly the film industry, is said to be feeding men's libidinal and economic cravings, and as a result, it has evolved into "a superstructural expression of reified capitalist patriarchy." Meena T Pillai (2017) quotes the 68th report of the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) to state that women's labour participation in Kerala is hopelessly behind men's. The percentage of males who work is 57.8%, but the percentage for females is over 24.8 percent. Meena T. Pillai (2017) contends that as the state's grasp on power has grown, new patriarchies have emerged. She notes the existence of a network in the Malayalam film industry, where celebrities take on the role of controllers over various industry sectors like distribution, exhibition, and production. Eventually, this network led to the creation of an ownership conglomerate that is primarily controlled by the stars.

The belief in the social, economic, and political equality of men and women is known as feminism. Feminism has its roots mostly in the West, but it is present around the world and is represented by a number of organizations that work to advance the rights and interests of women. The statement advocates for equal chances for all genders without discounting the biological distinctions between them. Everything is covered, including the political, social, and economic spheres. In actuality, feminist movements have played a significant role in women's empowerment throughout history. The twentieth-century feminist movements made it feasible for people to work, own property, vote, and receive an education.

Not only is feminism vital for women, but also for people of all sexes, genders, castes, and creeds. Both individuals and society at large gain strength from it. One

widespread misperception is that feminists can only be women.Though it is utterly false, feminism has advantages for everyone. It aims to promote gender equality rather than women's supremacy. The long-standing gender norms are taken on by feminism and attempted to be dismantled. Because of this, people are free to live empowered lives free from societal constraints.
To put it another way, both men and women gain from it. For example, it supports women's equality and freedom to work, but it also asks why men should provide for the family alone. It seeks to grant everyone freedom. Above all, young people need to be active participants in the feminist movement. In this manner, we can get speedier outcomes. Living in a society where equality is the norm is nothing less than a fantasy. Thus, in order to realize this ambition, we must all look within our own cultures and communities. Even if we are still in the process of reaching our goal, we must keep going in order to succeed in our endeavor.

Everyone's life has changed as a result of feminism, but especially that of women. It is what granted women the right to vote, as history demonstrates. Though it was a significant accomplishment, women were able to pull it off. Furthermore, feminism in the current day is demonstrated by the life-altering campaigns it engages in. Women can exercise their right to choose, for example, by supporting campaigns that advocate for the right to an abortion and the prevention of unintended pregnancies. In addition, feminism actively challenges patriarchy and rejects gender norms. It gives guys the freedom to be anyone they want to be without fear of criticism. Men can now cry without shame because they need to be free to express themselves. In a similar vein, it greatly benefits the LGBTQ community as well by advocating for their rights. Everyone has a place in feminism, and the only way to comprehend everyone's struggle is to embrace intersectional feminism.

Feminism, put simply, is the belief that both genders should have the same chances and rights. Respecting the varied experiences, identities, skills, and strengths of women is essential to enabling them to fully exercise their rights. It's about giving varied women and girls the same possibilities in life . Film feminism theory delves into how women are depicted in movies and how feminist viewpoints can be utilized to scrutinize and evaluate films. This theoretical framework analyzes the portrayal of gender roles, stereotypes, and power dynamics on the silver screen, as well as the reciprocal relationship between films and societal perceptions of women. Moreover, it

examines how factors like race, class, sexuality, and ethnicity intersect with gender to influence cinematic representations. Scholars and critics employing film feminism theory assess whether movies challenge or perpetuate conventional gender norms, advocating for more varied and empowering portrayals of women in cinemaboys and men, and about leveling the playing field between the sexes. Feminism's central message should emphasize the freedom to give the movement a personal meaning. It is to acknowledge that others have the right to do the same thing.The unfortunate thing is that, despite feminism being a powerful movement, discrimination and the exploitation of women still exist in some parts of the world. We should all endeavor to practice intersectional feminism as a result.

In Indian cinema, especially Malayalam cinema, women have long been treated as possessions. For a very long time, Malayalam films severely restricted the roles and character development chances available to women, portraying them as inferior and subordinate to males. Women were often portrayed as the victim or the love interest, with little agency or control over their lives. Malayalam films often depicted women as subservient mothers, wives, or conventions, and the traditional representation of women as daughters who were expected to follow traditional rules. When women did get more prominent roles, it was usually as stereotypes, with the emphasis in the film being more on their appearance and sexuality than their abilities and accomplishments. Among the hot topics covered in feminist Indian cinema are women's liberation, gender inequity, sexual harassment, domestic abuse, and gender identity. These films usually feature strong, independent female protagonists who defy patriarchal norms and traditional gender stereotypes. They usually emphasize how important education, financial stability, and social support are to women's empowerment. Over the years, Indian cinema has shifted towards portraying women in a more refined and nuanced manner. Women are portrayed as strong, self-reliant, and intelligent individuals these days who challenge traditional gender stereotypes. The emergence of feminism in Indian cinema has had a significant impact on society, promoting gender equality and increasing consciousness of gender-related matters. Female actor’s appearance to males has come to define who she is as a woman. Men act, and women show up. Men observe women. Women see themselves scrutinized. This establishes the relationships between women and themselves as well as those between men and women. The female being surveyed is the male who is conducting

the survey. As a result, she transforms into an object—more specifically, an object of sight.

Events that upend our worldview and the way our society is structured are referred to as "revolutions." If the history of world revolutions has taught us anything, it is that women were not given any special rights. We fought for them and won them . The claim that women's revolutions have endured the longest is not made simply. There is still much to be done.

# CHAPTER 1

## MISOGYNY IN MOLLYWOOD FILMS

Malayalam films are consistently commended for their captivating narratives and intricate character development. However, a lot of people spoke out against the continued misogyny in the sector. Unless the film is centred around women, actresses play minimal or no roles. This situation is a reflection of the state's profoundly ingrained patriarchy and gender inequality, which merely supports modernity on the surface. The audience worships their heroes as demi-gods and emulates them. Therefore, it is imperative that they provide healthy material. Strong female characters are still rare in Malayalam films nowadays; most of them are relegated to supporting roles and plot devices. The industry is ruled by fan associations and superstars. The Association of Malayalam Movie Artists (AMMA)'s response to the kidnapping and sexual assault of a female actor highlights the industry's male predominance. In reaction to the, the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC) was established. Misogynistic stance taken by a Malayalam film industry group that is dominated by men. The industry mocked the group with a comedic performance featuring celebrities and other female actresses since they could not tolerate these strong opinions.

The patriarchy that is strongly embedded in Keralan society is reflected in the misogyny in Malayalam movies. JC Daniel's long-awaited ambition of having the first Malayalam feature film, Vigathakumaran, premiered on November 7, 1928. A sizable crowd watched the film in Trivandrum's Capitol Theatre. Daniel was initially ecstatic, but soon after, the screen was taken over by an enraged mob. The movie's female lead, PK Rosi, a Dalit Christian, was the catalyst for this since she portrayed Sarojini, a Nair woman. The feudal Nair caste was infuriated to see a Dalit woman, who is shunned by society and considered to be spiritually contaminated, portraying a Nair lady. In addition to being mistreated and attacked, her home was set on fire. The first female superhero was afraid for her life. In addition to being mistreated and attacked, her home was set on fire. The first female heroine in Malayalam cinema history had to go to Tamil Nadu out of fear for her life, where she lived a life unknown to others.

Keralan film has advanced significantly. After 91 years, the Malayalam cinema industry is now widely known for producing some of the best films in the nation, always exploring socially conscious themes and employing inventive narrative. But what about Malayalam cinema's female protagonists? The othering of women on screen still exists today.

There are many examples for misogyny in Malayalam films. Some of them are as follows**:** The actor Thilakan, who plays a vicious stepfather in a 1986 film directed by the talented Padmarajan, tells Mohanlal, his stepdaughter's boyfriend, in a moving sequence that "now you can take her." Insisting that "I have her and now you take her" is what the haughty tone is saying. The idea that a woman is suddenly useless because she was intimate with him is a Malayali man's constant fantasy, which is largely summed up by that.

In the 1999 film "Njangal Santhushtaraanu," which is about a married couple, the wife is portrayed as an egocentric, contemporary woman who despises Keralan tradition. The movie is the best illustration of the "kulapurushan," or ideal man, turning his spouse into the "kulastree," or ideal lady. However, the film depicts a sequence of events in which the husband mistreats the wife, justifying it as a means of "curing her mindset."The husband who beats and humiliates his wife appears to be justified in the movie, even addressing her gender with the comment, "Women should be quiet and disciplined." Her father praises him as a "God" at the movie's conclusion simply for choosing to wed her even though he was aware of her true whereabouts. Back in the day, this movie was a huge blockbuster and was praised as a family friendly entertainment. This is a prominent trend in Malayalam films from before the year 2000. Women who speak English fluently, dress in contemporary fashion, and voice their opinions in public without fear are portrayed as arrogant and self-centered, but they will be saved by the hero. Finally, she will change into the 'kulastree' avatar, who will apologize for her'sins' and wear a traditional saree. In Malayalam cinema, using femininity as a means of insult is another prevalent feature. Mammooty plays a part in the wildly popular Malayalam movie "The Truth" in which he tells a character played by Vani Viswanath, "nee verum pennannu," which translates to "you are only a woman." Those young males who looked up to Mammootty clapped and applauded this discourse. This conversation gained so much traction that women are really silenced by it in real life. This discussion was the subject of viral memes. Similar

phrase is also shown in movies like "Athirathan" (1984) and "Nadanpennum Naatupramanimarum" (2000).

The 2016 movie "Kasaba" caused a great deal of controversy in the region. In the movie, Mammootty plays a police officer who threatens a female cop by stating, "If I would like to, I can stop your menstrual cycle" (15:37). Actress Parvathy sparked the issue when she brought up this offensive clip during a Kerala film festival. She had expressed disappointment at finding a top-notch actor playing a scenario that devalues women. She was criticizing the way misogyny is portrayed in Malayalam movies. Parvathy had to deal with threats of rape and cyberattacks. Young males are likely to relate to and spread these dialogues because they continue to lead fan groups, mimic their heroes, and reproduce dialogues. In many Malayalam films, including those starring big-name actors, stalking and molestation are romanticized. In the movie "Kelkatthe Shabdham," Mohanlal portrays Babu, a drug addict who follows his ex-lover Jayanti (Ambika) and threatens to "leave you alone." Due to the main narrative of another film, "Vandanam," a hero is also shown chasing a heroine. Years later, Dileep plays Sahadevan, an aspirant police officer who develops feelings for Mina (Bhavana) and begins to stalk her in the 2003 film CID Moosa. Because to his persistent stalking, she loses her job. He says, "I won't leave you alone," in response to her confronting him. "I promise to adore you, get you pregnant, and ruin your childhood. At last, you ask me for some water. You simply observe," he said, turning to leave heroically. The men laughed and applauded during this exchange. However, males who couldn't take "no" for an answer frightened women. Many guys are inspired to engage in unhealthy behavior in real life by movies that romanticize stalking and similar behaviors. It is a terrible crime against women to stalk them. Despite the fact that many people are unaware of it since the actors who seem to be idolized by the fans romanticize it. A girl is portrayed in the majority of Malayalam films as having been nurtured with the intention of getting married. The daughters or sisters are shown to the family as a liability and a burden. The hero puts in a lot of effort to arrange her marriage. Nobody appears to give a damn about her desires. In the 2016 film "Oppam," a man betrays his best buddy to a serial murderer after the latter offers him a large sum of money. "I have two daughters," he attempts to say in order to defend the same. In the 2009 film "Bhagyadevatha," starring Jayaram, the husband Benny (Jayaram) beats and degrades his wife Daisy (Kaniha) for not

providing him with a dowry. When his sister wants to get married off and requires a marriage, he learns his lesson. Having single sisters or daughters is the finest approach for a main character to gain the audience's sympathies.

Additionally, the movies normalize heroes engaging in sexual harassment while calling it "love." Such scenes are shown by Mahayanam (1989) and Kanmadam (1998). Most villains have utilized sexual assault and other forms of violence against women as a means of silencing independent-minded female protagonists. A goon forces Kavya Madhavan's character Shari in the 2006 film "Lion" to be depicted as a "raped woman" since, in the eyes of society, being "raped" is worse than "raping." She is called "aa sadhanam" (that thing) in jest. The survivor's mother continues to say that her life has been ruined and that she has been ruined and disfigured. rape survivors' objectification and portrayal as "withered flowers" or "destroyed vessels beyond repair". " It is implied that a woman's vagina is where her dignity is found and thus being raped ends her life. This truly captures the prevailing mindset of the society in which we reside. In the film 22 Female Kottayam, Rima Kallingal plays Tessa Abraham, who fights back against her rapists, deviating from the conventional storyline. But she keeps saying the same things: "My life is ruined," "I am impure," and "I am stained." It is her declaration that she will never be the same. In the movie Puthiyaniyamam, Nayantara plays Vasuki, a rape survivor who battles for justice. The film makes a compelling case for the death sentence as a deterrent to rape and for its application. However, the film's powerful female lead ultimately propagates an anti-feminist viewpoint by referring to herself as a "impure vessel." Rape survivors will never receive justice as long as they are subjected to this disgusting persecution and objectification.

In real life, Malayalam films are  used to suppress women. It seems that the whole male film industry, including writers, directors, and performers, has been devoting all of their mental energy and creative juice to stifling women. Phrases such as "pennu pennite sthaanathirikkanam" (literally, "a woman should remain in her place") and "pennayal adakkavum othukkavum venam" (literally, "women should be quiet and disciplined") are frequently spoken, typically by heroic figures who have a history of mistreating and intimidating women. As strange as it may sound, it has been the foundation of careers. There is an industry dedicated to harassing women, and no so-called Malayalam celebrity is exempt from this. Even just a few years ago, a number

of movies starring male chauvinists in the lead characters were box office successes, inspiring filmmakers to create prequels and sequels. Of course, there have been changes as young men and women have united to challenge the existing quo, shift the narrative, and bring in the future.

Heroes are admired so much that fan clubs, sculptures, and even entire temples bear their names. The audience reveres and emulates their heroes as gods. Therefore, it is imperative that they provide healthy material. There are still not enough strong female roles in Malayalam films. They become little more than story devices and decorations. When making art or a movie, the viewer should always come first.

A well-known Malayalam actor was abducted and sexually assaulted inside a moving vehicle a few years ago. She endured all the horrors that a victim of this society must endure, from humiliation by the crowd to victimization by the media when they leaked her identity.
Although the government ensured reforms in terms of women's safety, the industry first came up to support her and the accused men were apprehended by the police. But the response from AMMA makes it very evident how male-dominated the profession is, especially after a superstar was named as the case's primary planner and detained.

For the sake of "safety," women's freedom and mobility are restricted. Being out late at night and getting raped is considered a "normal" occurrence. Thankfully, there are a lot more women speaking out about this now. The actor's decision to return to acting while fervently advocating for justice is what makes this episode so memorable. This is a huge statement against a society that has openly supported rape culture. In addition to praising her choice, actor Prithviraj posted on Facebook, saying, "COURAGE————SOME OF THE MOST POIGNANT MOMENTS IN MY LIFE HAVE BEEN PUNCTUATED WITH MOMENTS OF INCREDIBLE... His words have a significant impact because misogyny has long been praised in Malayalam literature. Manju Warrier, an actress, praised him for the same. Prithviraj has frequently used misogynistic overtones in his works. "Chocolate" features Prithviraj's character, Shyam, misbehaving with Roma's character, Ann. He even goes so far as to tell her that she won't be free for ten months because he will impregnate her. Prithviraj's remarks prompt contemplation on the extreme misogyny that permeates Malayalam film, not only in his earlier works but also in general.

The main issues with "Aadu 2" were how women were portrayed and the use of sexist comedy, which spurred discussions about misogyny in Malayalam film. Despite being a comedy, the film has received backlash for several of its lines and sequences that perpetuate gender stereotypes and treat female characters in a demeaning way. A sequence in "Aadu 2" in particular that drew a lot of criticism featured the objectification of women for humorous effect. Critics contended that by treating women more like objects than fully formed characters, the movie resorted to cheap humor. Furthermore, a few lines in the film were considered insulting and unpleasant to women, which added to the overall impression of misogyny. The "Aadu 2" scandal sparked conversations about the need for more empathy for women in comedic films as well as the duty of filmmakers to depict gender-sensitive material. It also brought up issues regarding the wider cultural perceptions of women in the Malayalam film industry and the degree to which popular cinema mirrors and reinforces these perceptions. In general, the "Aadu 2" debate served as a reminder of how crucial it is to question stereotypes and critically analyze media representations, especially when it comes to gender, in order to encourage more inclusive and respectful depictions of women in movies.

Despite the title suggesting an emphasis on female characters and their experiences, the 2018 film "Queen" drew criticism for the way it treated women and for perpetuating gender stereotypes. The film's portrayal of female characters was criticized for lacking depth and for excessively depending on clichés and overused tropes rather than providing a nuanced examination of the characters' identities and experiences. The lack of complex female characters in Malayalam films has added to the continuing debates around gender representation in the industry. The opposition to "Queen" highlights how critical it is to explore women's intricacies, hardships, and victories in movies rather than only focusing on their surface-level representations. The film's actual content fell short of expectations for a progressive portrayal of women, despite the title suggesting otherwise, underscoring the need for more thoughtful narratives.

The 2019 film "Oru Adaar Love" caused controversy mostly because of a scene that went viral in which actor Priya Prakash Varrier winked at her male co-star. The sequence was first praised for its purity and attractiveness, but it eventually came under fire for being seen as endorsing eve-teasing and the objectification of women.

Opponents contended that, rather than encouraging positive connections and courteous relationships, the wink's representation reinforced negative stereotypes and normalized conduct linked to harassment. The criticism around this sequence sparked new debates about misogyny, consent, and the duty of filmmakers to portray relationships and interactions in a way that upholds equality and respect. The movie tried to convey the whimsicality of adolescent infatuation, but the way it handled the wink sequence highlighted the need for more sensitivity .

The Women in Cinema Collective, or WCC as it is more often known, was established as a collective for female performers who were involved in Malayalam cinema, including singers, actors, and directors. Following the terrible attack on the female actor that year, which shocked Keralans to their core, the collective came to define itself. The choice to form a collective of this kind was a reaction to the misogynistic stance taken by the male-dominated Malayalam film association (AMMA), which was founded in 1985. The Association of Malayalam Movie Artists, or AMMA as it is commonly called, aims to protect and nurture its members while offering a professional forum for candid and constructive dialogue. When it was later discovered that a prominent male actor had planned the attack, the industry's double standards were exposed. This actor was arrested and had three bail requests denied. The AMMA organization as a whole chose to downplay the actor's violent attack rather than take a clear stand against the male actor. The Malayalam cinema industry went so far as to criticize the Collective by showcasing a brief drama during the AMMA-organized event called AMMA Mazhavillu (Rainbow). "Women Empowerment: Inaugural Ceremony of the Collective" was the title of the drama. Superstars and a few female performers played the parts of the female artists who had ventured to create the collective in this brief performance. The snarky remarks and observations, which had very little humor and were in poor taste, were meant to minimize the efforts of the women and the script. The barbs were barely veiled. Every character fit a preconceived notion, and it was made clear that the ladies were weak, hypocritical, superficial, and incredibly dumb. As the play develops, it endorses male dominance through a variety of dialogues and situations. Superstars play enticing alpha males, while the female characters emphasize their masculinity with dancing moves and songs. The women are portrayed as naturally conceited, which is true of every female character that has ever graced the screens throughout the illustrious era of superstardom. The brief play confirms the collective's apparent resistance to the

patriarchal hegemonic powers that have dominated the Malayalam film industry, as well as their dread and uncertainty.

There isn't a Northern Alliance of women in Malayalam cinema; the women who revolt and struggle are few in number. However, they are heard clearly, and in just a few years, the WCC as a whole appears to have come a long way. The AMMA hasn't missed an occasion to make fun of the WCC's aggressive involvement in matters, and social media users are also actively involved in trolling and have even threatened a few actresses in a negative way. Notwithstanding all of this, the WCC continues to uphold its principles and fervent goal of removing misogyny from motion pictures. They also ask for equal remuneration and a safe working environment for actresses. Their comments are logical and organic; they challenge the narratives and positions of the privileged by posing thoughtful questions. This group poses a serious danger to male dominance, and every act of violence—virtual or actual—seems to give them more strength and empowerment in their fight for equality and decency at work.

# CHAPTER 2

# THE GREAT INDIAN KITCHEN

Written and directed by Jeo Baby, The Great Indian Kitchen (Malayalam: mahattāya bhāratīya aṭukkaḷa) is an Indian drama film from 2021. The movie revolves around a newlywed woman who finds it difficult to live up to her husband's (Suraj Venjaramood) and his family's expectations of her as a subservient wife. Mathews Pulickan and Sooraj S. Kurup wrote the soundtrack. The film debuted exclusively on Neestream on January 15, 2021.In addition to winning the Kerala State Film Award for Best Film, the Best Screenplay award for Jeo Baby, and the Best Sound Designer award for Tony Babu, the movie was widely praised by critics.

She does the cooking, peeling, chopping, grinding, washing, serving, sweeping, and mopping of the floor. He consumes food. She's running on all fours. He is sitting quietly, breathing in and out while practicing yoga. That's the plot of the low-budget movie The Great Indian Kitchen, which exposes the hardships of daily life while masterfully capturing the subtleties of a patriarchal household. The drama that takes place in a dark, dirty kitchen in a "respectable" middle-class family has already earned praise as "the breakout film of the year" and generated a lot of discussion on social media and in the southern state of Kerala. It has also raised disturbing questions about subtle sexism in homes."It's an enduring tale. The story of practically every Indian woman is her battle in the kitchen, according to the film's director, Jeo Baby. "Men think women are machines, for making tea and washing clothes and raising kids." He claims that his personal kitchen served as the source of inspiration for The Great Indian Kitchen.

Nimisha Sajayan, an educated dancer from Bahrain who was raised in Manama, finds herself in an arranged marriage to Suraj Venjaramood, a teacher, in a very traditional and patriarchal household. As the Wife's home routine commences in the blissful serenity of a newlywed marriage, things start to go wrong. While men go to their phones or practice yoga, women are left to do the menial tasks of the kitchen, including cleaning, soiled dishes, and dripping faucets. Because of how patriarchal the family is, her mother-in-law gives her husband, the father-in-law, the toothbrush in the morning so he can brush his teeth. Without thinking about how the women will be

able to eat in the same area after them, the guys finish their meals first and depart the area messy. Their comfort and convenience always take precedence over their wives' needs. The new bride's mother-in-law departs to look after her seven-month-pregnant daughter while the new bride takes some time to get used to her new surroundings and eventually finds some peace with them.

She is solely in charge of cleaning, cooking, and other domestic duties. Her conceited spouse shows little consideration for her needs or emotions. He questions whether she has had prior sex experiences when she informs him that it hurts and requests some foreplay. Her father-in-law prohibits her from working, saying that having a woman in the home makes the family prosperous. When she finally gets her period, she is horrified to learn how incredibly backwards the families' views on menstruation are. She is instructed to lock herself in a floored room, take a river bath, eat in private, and wash everything she touches. She is even asked to go sleep outside or see a relative. As these things are going on, Kerala is struggling with the ruling from the courts at the Sabarimala temple, which stated that women should be able to enter the shrine because menstruation is not an impurity. Many individuals, including the groom's family, disagree with the decision. Eventually, the injustices culminate in the wife hurling dirty kitchen sink water at her father-in-law and husband, forcing her to leave the family in pursuit of her independence and dignity. The movie closes with her arriving in her own car as an independent dancing instructor, her ex-husband getting remarried, and it appears that the second wife will suffer the same fate as the first.

Another expertly staged sexual scene is presented to us, and unlike the last one, it causes a far more intense psychological response. We are currently being inundated with a series of obscene photos straight out of the kitchen. We utter "Ugh!" several times. But her sex life is plagued by more than just culinary problems. Even worse is the state of affairs in the bedroom. When she confides in her spouse that she has been hurting while "doing it" and that "some foreplay would help," the crisis intensifies. The husband's line of work presents the greatest irony. He is a teacher at a school where he is teaching about "family values," "building the foundation of a family," and other related topics. The phrase "you wear progressive slippers, but leave them at the doorstep" is a common one in Kerala. The Great Indian Kitchen seeks to alter this.

"Women are living in jails created by men. Men are decision makers, women are workers and they don't even get paid for it," says Baby. "Through the movie, I want to tell women that you must get out of this trap, why continue to suffer? This is also your world to enjoy." The title's usage of the word "great" must be the most sarcastic because it engulfs "molae," reduces her to a little size, and imprisons her. From the moment she wakes up until she goes to bed, her day is filled with directives. She must prepare meals that are precisely cooked (rice cannot be prepared in a pressure cooker; it must be cooked over the fire; leftovers from lunch cannot be consumed for supper). Cleaning the messy table, gathering and washing dishes, mopping the stairs, disposing of the foul-smelling trash in a more pungent dugout in the backyard, hand washing clothes (no, no, the machine will weaken the fiber), hanging them up and folding them away when dry, brewing tea for esteemed guests (oho, is this what you call black tea? ), and recline for the traditional marital sex are all tasks she must complete. After that, resume all of the cooking, cleaning, and washing until "etta" insists that the lights be turned out.

No break for time. No time for herself, save for that particular period of the month when she is exiled to a small mat on the floor and kept untouchable until she purifies herself "on the seventh day," ensuring that her spouse, who has sworn a holy vow of abstinence, will not see her. Patriarchy still exists and is very much in use. People who are unaware of these antiquated "customs" and "traditions" are either blind or extremely fortunate. The Great Indian Kitchen is liberal with its offerings. Not only is the kitchen her domain (a leaking pipe will keep leaking because 'etta,' who is always busy, hasn't had time to call the plumber); she also has to dust the hallways and the bedroom, where she must behave herself properly and refrain from making demands of herself. You watch her smile fade away. She is not a person; she is just a beast. Her removal from the objectionable video she published on Facebook is requested; she is a vessel, not someone with the ability to express an opinion, and definitely not someone who can participate in the discussion around menstruating women's exclusion from the Sabarimala shrine. How could she?

Suraj and his father literally leave the dining table every morning, with leftovers strewn everywhere. Initially, we believe it to be a matter of bad table etiquette. Subsequently, though, we witness Suraj at a restaurant, methodically arranging his leftovers on a side dish. As noted by Nimisha, "Table manners

illathonnumalla"(53:22). This is a classic case of male entitlement at work: the assurance that, no matter how disorganized he leaves the table, a woman would handle it all in the end. The movie plays on this very entitlement, making every male audience feel a little terrible about how they have conformed with it in their own homes. (After all, how many times have we consumed a beverage and then forgotten the glass? The scenes are expertly crafted, expertly set, and expertly ordered. Using the well-worn justification that "what you homemakers do is more noble and meaningful than what politicians and businessmen do"(01:04:08). Nimisha's father-in-law forbids her from seeking for jobs. And Nimisha is seen cleaning an undergarment in the very next picture! APJ Abdul Kalam and other distinguished scientists are depicted on the wall as Suraj strolls down his workplace's corridor, griping to his colleague about his wife's violation of his Sabarimala fast. (Bypassing science, literally! unwashed at the sink?) The soap bottle and the wastewater seeping from the pipe serve as recurring themes throughout the movie, as Nimisha struggles to get rid of the mess's odor no matter how vigorously she lathers her hands with soap. Suraj's unwillingness to contact the plumber is an indication of humanity's lethargy to address the malfunctioning system, and the dirty water building up at the sink is a gauge of her subjugation. It is important to highlight that certain women, who are taught from an early age that this is how "good women" behave, are equally responsible for perpetuating these outdated traditions in addition to men. Today's level of patriarchy is the product of "double non-thinking," where women accept the status quo for decades while males do not think about the other sex.

The movie also addresses the issue of "cleanliness hypocrisy." Nimisha's hands are messy and oily when she's cleaning up her husband's mess at the dinner table. Suraj approaches her and gives her an embrace in spite of her bringing this up. The biggest irony of all is that the guys in the home think she's dirty when she gets her period and won't let her touch or do anything.

The movie also explores the flagrant disregard for women's reproductive needs. Suraj's initial reaction, when Nimisha informs him that she is on her period, is to advise her to get takeout because an unclean woman is not permitted in the kitchen, which means there is no food in the house. Instead, he should ask her how she is feeling and whether she needs pads, etc. Additionally, one of the films's Interestingly, rather of starting with the traditional "Thank God," the movie opens with "Thanks

Science." Although there is room for discussion on the message's atheism, the movie sheds light on blind religious adherents rather than on God or religion. However, there are significant concerns about the intense devotion to these traditions that persist among individuals to this day. The antics of Suraj's household during the "Sabarimala fast" are extensively highlighted despite their severe conservatism. We also witness a girl swamy who is naive enough to disregard the "rules" and meet Nimisha during her menstrual cycle, to contrast the situation. Situations involving sex that are most moving. The idea of consenting during intercourse is another crucial topic that is touched with in the film. When the woman requests "foreplay"( 01:07:35) and mentions pain during the "act," she is looked down upon. When she makes fun of him for having bad table manners, the husband becomes enraged, sending a clear message to the woman who clears the table after you finish dining. The mother-in-law is a good character  in the film. She is shown as a traditional, hardworking woman in the first half of the film, who blindly follows the patriarch's decisions and preferences. However, in the second half of the film, she is shown as a modern, forward-thinking woman who wears a salwar instead of a saree and who encourages her daughter-in-law to pursue her career.

It's an unusual editing pattern. Nimisha first appears to us at a dance workshop. Every move she takes is accompanied by pans of food, implying that this is how her life was going to change from then on. The majority of the movie takes place within a house, and the first half of the movie consists entirely of establishing shots without any dialogue. However, the edit—which combines three uninteresting scenes—makes for a more interesting viewing. Additionally, some scenarios can be more fully immersed thanks to the deft placement of continuous views.

Nimisha Sajayan gives a subtle performance that elevates the narrative. She skillfully captures the sense of rage that grows inside of her (and us) with each day that goes by in that home. As the uninterested spouse, Suraj Venjaramoodu appears trim and provides enough of support.

On the first night of his marriage, Suraj's portrayal of the new groom promotes patriarchy by making sexually suggestive gestures such as asking her to turn off the light. His facial expressions when she discloses that she is menstruating and requests sanitary napkins also convey his belief in masculine domination. The film centers on

four key characters: the father-in-law (a family head), the mother-in-law, Suraj (as the husband), and Nimisha (as the wife). As Nimisha takes over the cooking and the mother-in-law leaves the house to care for her pregnant daughter, the movie picks up speed.

The movie portrays traditional gender roles where women are expected to fulfill domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning, and serving their families, while men are often portrayed as breadwinners who hold authority outside the home. These rigid gender roles reinforce stereotypes about women's roles as caregivers and men's roles as providers, perpetuating a hierarchical gender structure. The Great Indian Kitchen's power stems from more than just its content. Using the film's visuals, director Baby does a great job of drawing the viewer into the wife's suffering. Consider the scene where the wife is standing at the kitchen door and giving it a somewhat longer look than normal. She danced in a previous life. She is now a housewife who is compelled to do a new type of dance in which she juggles pots and pans while fixing a broken drain pipe. The pipe represents the crack in her marriage to her husband; it breaks like their relationship and he ignores it all the way to the end. Sajayan does a fantastic job portraying the wife's suffering, and it's obvious that she wants to run away from this mess, or even just get a day off. The movie immerses us in the mood and creates a psychic bond between the audience and its characters with such delicate performances and sparse background music. The wife finally gets her wish for a day off after much praying, but it's not exactly how she had hoped. When she has her period, she actually takes a whole week off from cooking. Unfortunately, it brings about an entirely new degree of suffering for her when she is exiled to the status of an untouchable. Paradoxically, she isn't being mistreated by a male at this time. Even putting the woman in solitary confinement, her aunt-in-law is unwavering in her constraints. It's interesting to note that her harsh behavior doesn't come from animosity; rather, she merely sticks to her guns and sets the same rules for her wife that she had to. Her behavior demonstrates how patriarchal culture teaches women to oppress rather than to defend. Especially heartbreaking is the scene where the aunt-in-law bids the wife goodbye on the seventh day. She smiles as if nothing had happened and walks away. Jeo Baby draws attention to this social ill in our societies and makes the case that it almost violates human rights. The background music, meanwhile, blends together with news reports and popular social media posts that expose the ways in which a

woman's menstrual cycle is exploited to body-shame her and prevent her from entering temples like Sabarmiala's Ayappa temple. However, during the 40-day "Ayyappa Mandala vratham" period, which ends with a visit to the same temple, men are seen as God's messengers. Examining the startling contradictions that Indians experience on a daily basis is encouraged by The Great Indian Kitchen.

The film highlights the unequal division of labor between men and women, with women shouldering the burden of household chores and caregiving responsibilities. The protagonist's daily routine revolves around cooking and cleaning, reflecting the societal expectation that women are primarily responsible for maintaining the household, while men are exempt from such duties. Women in the film are depicted as having limited agency and autonomy, particularly in matters concerning their own lives and bodies. The protagonist's desires and aspirations are subordinated to the expectations placed upon her as a wife, highlighting the lack of control women have over their own destinies within patriarchal structures. The film subtly addresses the normalization of gender-based violence within Indian households, with instances of emotional manipulation and control perpetrated by male family members. While not overtly depicted, the pervasive culture of misogyny and patriarchy contributes to an environment where such behavior is tacitly condoned. Social expectations regarding women's behavior and appearance are also evident in the film, with pressure to conform to idealized notions of femininity and modesty. This perpetuates stereotypes about women's roles as passive and submissive, reinforcing the notion that women exist primarily for the pleasure and service of men.

The Great Indian Kitchen seems like a straightforward story at first, but it opens our eyes to how easily we conceal gender disparity in our day-to-day behaviors while delivering a potent message against it. The movie has moments of genius, like in the restaurant scene where the woman and her husband sit side by side at a table—a luxury she is never allowed to have within their own house. Gender bias, regressive conduct, and other societal problems that have existed for centuries are not eliminated with time; rather, they are steadfastly upheld by subsequent generations. The film deftly portrays these problems while simultaneously putting up a daring remedy: breaking the pattern and severing the generational chain of intolerance by establishing a new one that emphasizes the autonomy and self-worth of women. When the wife abandons her husband and breaks up their partnership in order to follow her passion,

we witness a significant step in that direction. By teaching a group of young girls her liberated art form, she breaks a new chain. The movie shows us that by empowering the weak, we may make the world a better place by eliminating the need to punish the unreformable.

# CHAPTER 3

## KAATHAL- THE CORE

Adarsh Sukumaran and Paulson Skaria wrote the script for the 2023 Indian Malayalam-language drama film Kaathal - The Core, which was directed by Jeo Baby. The film, which features Mammootty and Jyothika, was produced by Mammootty Kampany. October 2022 saw the official announcement of the movie, and the same month saw the start of main photography, which ended in November 2022. Mathews Pulickan wrote the music. Salu K. Thomas took care of the cinematography, and Francies Louis handled the editing.When Kaathal - The Core was released on November 23, 2023, critics praised Jyothika and Mammootty's performances, and the film received excellent reviews. It was showcased in the Indian Panorama segment of the 54th IFFI. Love is a commonly utilized feeling that is often marketed to us by popular culture, literature, and religion. In fact, it may be misused. It is an equalizing idea that demands everyone be treated with dignity that is both private, public, and political. However, maintaining the promise of love in a relationship is frequently a revolutionary endeavor that requires more giving than receiving; only the courageous can successfully complete this trip. The film by Jeo Baby is an inspiring tale of love that is less restrictive and more liberating.

Mathew Devassy has a dignified existence in his village with his family of four: his wife Omana, daughter Femy, and father Devassy. As a result of his father's support of the CR Party, Mathew is able to run for local village body elections. He learns one evening that Omana has filed a divorce suit against him on the grounds that he is gay. When confronted about the possibility that it would prevent him from running for office, Omana responds that she filed it two months prior. They go to the Family Court, where Omana filed a petition claiming he has not fulfilled her marriage duties but has been excellent at raising a family, in order to expedite their trial. When the respondent's attorney asks how many times they had sex over their twenty years of marriage, she responds, "Four." When asked whether a divorce was necessary at the time, Mathew's attorney responds that under the statute in effect at the time (IPC 377), if Mathew had filed the petition sooner, she would have faced criminal charges.

During the prosecution's cross-examination, Mathew refutes his homosexuality and his relationship with Thankan, the man who is allegedly his partner in the case. Thankan, a driving instructor, laments that his school is overrun with women and that his sexual orientation is unusual. Kuttayi, his nephew, breaks down in the face of bullying and persecution at school. Meanwhile, Mathew's election campaigning has the party perplexed. As the case moves forward, Devassy is called as a direct witness and acknowledges that his son has been gay since he was a little child and that he forced the marriage because of social pressures. That evening, Devassy breaks down in grief and acknowledges that he was to blame for his son's unfortunate events. Mathew apologizes to Omana and begs her to understand that he was scared to go. They both cried, and Omana claims that she desired a divorce to free them from this pointless family life. Mathew comes out as gay the following day while they are signing divorce papers, and he goes on to run for office.With Thankan as his companion, the election-winning Mathew is looking for a possible groom for Omana. The character of Omana is to be praised and analysed as it is the portrayal of a very stable and strong female character in Malayalam films. In this movie, a straight woman Omana and her unmarried homosexual husband, Matthew, who hasn't come out yet, try to end their terrible marriage. I'm in awe of Mammootty for giving Mathew life, and I'm all admiration for the film's director, Joe Baby. Having said that, I can't help but believe that Jyothika's Omana hasn't gotten the credit it merits. Omana is a striking example of subdued strength, in contrast to the clichéd portrayal of powerful women, who are frequently seen brandishing weapons or occupying positions of authority. She is not the tough woman dressed in leather and jeans; rather, she is a subdued powerhouse wearing a saree. Omana conveys volumes not only with her words but also with her actions, much like her character, who has few but meaningful dialogues.Omana is a devout and devout woman who embodies the traditional roles of a wife, mother, daughter, sister, and daughter-in-law from the first scene. She has struggled for almost 20 years, like many of us, with the limitations placed on her by patriarchal cultural expectations.

Although it took her years to have the strength to demand what she is due, once she makes the decision to put herself first, she doesn't give up. She is a kind and understanding person, but she will not stand to be taken advantage of. Omana chooses to file for divorce from Mathew and starts the process, but Mathew's intention to run in the next local by-election conflicts with the schedule. She knows full well that her

actions could cost Mathew the local by-election, embarrassment, and possibly social exclusion, but she won't back down from her position. Omana doesn't back down in the face of hostility from almost everyone, including the church father, her own brother, and Mathew.

"I understand the impact my decision will have on the people around me, but if I back off now, I would be unjust to myself," Omana says, firmly explaining her choice. Her tenacity and resolve are demonstrated in this scene. She has no intention of turning back after deciding to finally liberate herself from the patriarchal bonds that had held her captive for so long. If it was the pinnacle of Omana's strength, her capacity for forgiveness and compassion are best shown in the scene where she and Mathew eventually have a heart-to-heart discussion toward the end of the movie. "Don't you think you deserve to live a life that you desire?" she asks Mathew as he apologizes for all the hardships she's had to bear throughout their marriage. Are you honestly saying that I didn't do any of this for myself?

In spite of being misled and duped, this scene demonstrates Omana's empathy for him and her recognition that they were both victims of social expectations that kept them in defined positions.  Omana, who is now divorced, meets someone at a restaurant in the last scene. Her glowing complexion and tousled hair convey her acceptance of her newfound independence. Omana, who was raised in an unhappy marriage with patriarchal restrictions, is now discovering the limitless opportunities that come with life and love. Any lady who lives next door can relate to Omana's strength in Kaathal. It sends a strong message that women don't have to live up to the "badass" stereotype in order to be strong. Every woman who asserts her rights is a brave and resilient person. The fact that Omana Philip in Kaathal The Core has few dialogue exchanges is maybe her greatest feature. The main woman's succinct and snappy lines had a profound effect even during the movie's most intense sequences, which had the potential to become melodramatic. Director Jeo Baby and his writing team, Adarsh Sukumaran and Paulson Skaria, made a bold decision that gave Jyotika's portrayal of Omana a truly unique feel. Some LGBT individuals applauded the movie for how well it portrayed a gay character, however some anti-LGBT individuals left critical comments on Mammootty's social media accounts, criticizing the actor for his performance and calling for a boycott of the movie. The film's portrayal of

homosexuality was met with criticism from Christian and Muslim leaders who said it would "brainwash the youth".

In our society, sexuality has always been a sensitive topic. This also extends to our movies, which frequently reflect the society in which we live. It has frequently been regarded as taboo or mocked by the mainstream media for its painted portrayal. There have been prominent films like Deshanadakili Karayarilla that have conveyed the idea simply and effectively in the Malayalam film industry, which is praised for its realistic and progressive stories and portrayals. Indeed, the youthful brigade saw a coming-of-age moment when stars-in-their-own-rights Prithviraj Sukumaran and Nivin Pauly made the leap with Mumbai Police and Moothon. Kaathal - The Core receives high marks for its reasoned and considerate handling of a subject that is frequently misrepresented and misread in movies. Writers Paulson Skaria and Adarsh Sukumaran, please give yourselves a bow! In actuality, Baby is directing a movie that was written by someone else for the first time. However, he decided to collaborate on the music with Mathews Pulickan, his reliable assistant. We have to admit that this was a really wise choice, since music is just as significant a character in the movie as any other.

Which gets us to Kaathal - The Core's cast of characters. After watching Mammootty play Mathew, it's hard to picture anyone other in his position. The maestro is really at work here—not to mention the subtleties, body language, and voice modulations. However, the supporting cast of the movie is a welcome surprise. It is very offensive to refer to the other actors as the "support cast." For example, Sudhi's portrayal of Thangan will astound you. A man of few words, Thangan's brief conversations with Mathew are fascinating to watch. How exciting to find a hidden gem! Kaathal - The Core, like The Great Indian Kitchen, is a seminal work in Malayalam film. A glass ceiling has been broken by Baby and Mammootty, and one hopes that this will have a lasting and loud impact on society.

One of Kaathal's most striking pictures is of an insignificant couple outside a courthouse. The lady is feeding her infant, and there's a noticeable distance between her and her uninterested husband, who is staring at his phone more than she is. If we hadn't previously witnessed the events taking place in the courtroom behind them, involving Matthew (Mammootty) and Omana (Jyotika), another couple who is battling a divorce, the scene would have been typical. This parallel takes on a more

impactful significance owing to its placement in such a pivotal situation. In the courtroom, one lawyer brings up the painful reality of many homosexuals trapped in unwilling marriages of convenience. Is Mathew a homosexual or not? The film's closing moments provide an answer, and while that in and of itself is an intriguing idea, let's not see that as the film's primary intention because Kaathal is much more than a 'suspense' drama. In Kaathal, Jeo Baby—who made headlines in The Great Indian Kitchen by breaking down a loveless marriage—dissects a different kind of unhappy marriage. As the movie begins, a noticeable sensation of weight affects a few of its most important characters. An unclear exchange between a mother and daughter suggests that there may be tension below. But because of the way Mathew, Omana, and a few other key characters conduct themselves, Kaathal is mostly characterized by a quite calm tone. Most of the drama takes place inside. Jeo doesn't go back to any of the characters' traumatic experiences. This scenario is also intriguing since it raises issues related to walking the talk and gradations of progressiveness, among other things. A few members fear that they will lose votes as a result of what they perceive to be a "scandal." Is it, however, scandalous? Without the involvement of the courts, the church, the state, and, of course, the court of public opinion, a story like this would not have been complete. A less talented director would have likely chosen a more overtly dramatic tone, but Jeo Baby's director has shown time and time again that his abilities are in subtly expressing complex issues. Mammootty is the best actor he could have found for his content, which was written by Adarsh Sukumaran and Paulson Skaria. Kaathal provides another evidence that Mammootty still has the capacity to astound people in the most unexpected ways. It takes him just one minute to pull off an acting decision that has resonance well beyond the closing credits. The weight of a covert love affair, the weight of a deceptive lie told decades ago, and the weight of depriving someone of their freedom—all of these things are conveyed through a dialogue segment, a gesture, and a vocal modulation never before heard. The performances in this movie are the main focus, and Salu K. Thomas took care to keep the camera from being overbearing. Character placement in a frame is carefully considered, taking into account the characters' emotional distances in relation to each other and the composition. The first sections of Mathews Pulickan's score are marked by a sense of melancholy; as the characters move into a phase of liberation, the soundtrack has a more positive and powerful tone. Probably the most audacious endeavor in

Malayalam cinema to date is Kaathal, mostly because one of its biggest actors is leading a film that raises important and necessary concerns about a complicated subject that doesn't have to be. Why is it still forbidden to have a specific relationship choice that is thought to be normal? Why is it viewed as a "defect" by some people? Why would a megastar need this much time to take on a role like this? Alright, I suppose it's better late than never. Rather of being that really image-conscious star who dances around with women half their age or looks for the next desi Walter White, it's fantastic to see Mammootty stretching himself with screenplay choices like these. It's possible to claim that the civilization the movie depicts is primarily aspirational. Still, that narrative decision starts to make more sense if the director wants to convey that this is how society should treat specific people. Shall we also cheer for the most exquisitely poetic ending sequence in recent memory?

Kaathal is fundamentally a love story. However, the story of love skirts the latent anger at the unfavorable hand life has dealt its protagonists. No wistful dates in charming coffee shops, no strolling into the sunset. Rather, the film exposes the falsehoods LGBT men tell themselves, frequently at their parents' or society's insistence that they conform to social norms.

The LGBT Indian community has long lamented the lack of representation of the intricacies and myriad colors of queer lives in mainstream Indian films. This is a problem that continues to this day. When will a movie come out that depicts the complexity, complication, and twisted nature of certain LGBT relationships? Or a movie that tackles the hidden and overt homophobia that some homosexual men harbor? When gay men are forced to live as bisexuals, Kaathal highlights another important aspect that even the Supreme Court acknowledged in its historic 2018 ruling decriminalizing homosexuality.

Kaathal does not require its audience to support the husband over the woman or the other way around. Unfairly, they have both been made to live lives that they do not desire. Omana finds it heartbreaking to realize that she has wasted twenty years of her life waiting for her husband to touch, hug, or even show her some affection. Omana surprises Devassy's attorney during their divorce proceedings by revealing that they have only had sex four times in the previous twenty years. She only wants an amicable divorce; she does not seek alimony.

She only wants a peaceful divorce; she does not seek alimony. since her spouse is running for office. Even the well-known statement from Justice Indu Malhotra's 377

ruling that states that history should apologize to the LGBT community is used by Omana's attorney. She will undoubtedly stop censoring herself and putting the needs of the community before her own. She screams, "Shouldn't this apology also extend to the wives of queer men?"

Jeo Baby does not yield to simple prodding. It also doesn't preach. The sun-dappled shadows and the soft evening light fill the frame as the camera moves across the faces of the movie's characters. We witness the effects on Devassy's boyfriend Thankan, who is far lower on the privilege ladder than his lover, when he comes out after rumors about Omana's reasons for divorcing him grow on like wildfire in the little town. He muses while drinking late into the night with his companion about how the women in the town are now more at ease taking driving lessons from him since they are aware of his "taste."

A number of Malayalam films have questioned gender stereotypes and conventional gender roles by providing characters and stories with complex representations that defy accepted conventions. Here are a few noteworthy instances:

*Vaanku:* The 2020 Malayalam film "Vaanku" is helmed by Kavya Prakash. The issue of gender stereotyping is explored in the film, especially in light of the customary expectations and conventions imposed on women by society.The plot centers on a group of female high school students who start a band. Anna, the main character, wants to be a singer against her strict father's objections. Anna and her pals compete in a school music competition and follow their passion for music in spite of criticism from her family and society. They question cultural norms and gender stereotypes along the way. The movie tells a story of Razia, a Muslim girl who wants to be able to sing the Islamic call to prayer, Adhan, out loud. However, the societal construct gets in the way of her dream. She wants to sing it because she feels a spiritual connection to God, not as a challenge to the community. Thus, the film revolves around a woman's struggle against discrimination based on her gender and her right to autonomy and personal space.The movie depicts the social conventions and expectations that surround women's conformity to traditional gender roles. This patriarchal mentality is exemplified by Anna's father, who wants her to put marriage and school before her love of music.Women's Empowerment: The movie emphasizes women's empowerment and the value of following one's goals and objectives through Anna and her friends. The girls defy preconceived notions about women's duties and capacities by expressing their individuality and agency in the face of opposition and

criticism. "Vaanku" tells the story of the girls' journey as they rebel against social norms and break down boundaries. Their involvement in the music competition gives them a stage on which to display their abilities and stand up for their freedom to follow their passions, regardless of gender. The movie highlights how crucial female friendship and solidarity are to overcoming challenges and realizing objectives. Anna and her pals give a great representation of women's connections and camaraderie by helping one other through difficult times.The way in which "Vaanku" portrayed gender issues and emphasized female empowerment won appreciation. Audiences were moved by the film's subtle examination of women's aspirations and societal expectations, which sparked conversations about gender stereotypes and the need for greater gender equality in society.

*Uyare:* Manu Ashokan is the director of the Malayalam film "Uyare" from 2019. It explores the subject of gender stereotypes, especially as it relates to women's empowerment, aspirations, and ambition. Pallavi Raveendran, an aspiring pilot, is the subject of Uyare. Her lover Govind requests that she drop her lessons when she is accepted into a pilot training facility in Mumbai. Pallavi breaks up with him in a rage. He pours acid at her the following day, causing her vision to deteriorate and her flight permit to be revoked. But as the movie goes on, it becomes clear that Pallavi, despite Vishal's assistance—a guy who saves her—does not give herself another chance to dream.By showcasing Pallavi's desire to become a pilot, "Uyare" subverts gender norms. Her ambition to work in aviation contradicts social norms, which frequently restrict women's options to more traditional jobs.Especially in the wake of the acid assault, the movie tackles the topic of beauty standards and how society views physical appearance. Pallavi challenges conventional ideas of beauty and refuses to let her scars define who she is, even in spite of her deformities. Pallavi's portrayal of "Uyare" demonstrates the tenacity and fortitude of victims of gender-based abuse. Pallavi rises above great adversity to become a symbol of bravery and empowerment rather than a victim.The movie emphasizes the value of relationships of support, especially those involving women. Pallavi emphasizes the value of sisterhood and solidarity in overcoming adversity and finds comfort and strength in her friendships with other women."Uyare" won critical praise for its nuanced treatment of the topic of acid attacks and its potent depiction of gender conflicts. Audiences responded favorably to the film's theme of empowerment and resiliency, which sparked

conversations about gender stereotypes, violence against women, and the value of women's agency and autonomy.

*Naalu Pennungal* : We are introduced to four women by Naalu Pennungal who come from various social classes. It narrates the tales of a childless housewife, a spinster suspected of having an affair with her sister's husband, a virgin lady left by her husband, and a prostitute whose marriage is not recognized by the law. It depicts the grim truths of society, including how women are taken advantage of. However, each woman possesses the strength to live her life as she sees fit. Subversion of Conventional Roles: "Naalu Pennungal" subverts gender norms by showing women as complex, independent people with agency. The movie shows women with a range of experiences and backgrounds, emphasizing their fortitude, resiliency, and ability to defy patriarchal expectations. The movie challenges cultural norms and patriarchal systems that marginalize and oppress women through its themes. It challenges and questions prevalent gender stereotypes and inequalities while shedding focus to the injustices experienced by women in areas like sexuality, work, and education. The women in "Naalu Pennungal" exhibit fortitude, bravery, and agency in claiming their identities and pursuing their goals in spite of the obstacles they encounter. The film provides a nuanced portrayal while celebrating their originality and determination.The film "Naalu Pennungal" won praise from critics for its perceptive depiction of women's life and its investigation of gender dynamics in Keralan society. Audiences were moved by the film's subtle storyline and stirring performances, which sparked conversations about women's empowerment, gender stereotypes, and societal change.

*Kalimannu :* "Kalimannu" is a 2013 Malayalam drama film directed by Blessy that gained notice due to its contentious themes about childbirth and pregnancy. Even though the movie mostly centers on the experience of being pregnant and a mother, let's examine how it deals with gender stereotypes: The aspirant actress Meera marries the cab driver Shyam.

He tragically had an accident and is deemed brain dead. Following this event, his spouse chooses to undergo artificial insemination in order to become pregnant with his kid and donates his organs. Thus, the movie defies expectations associated with becoming a mother and a father. Single Motherhood: "Kalimannu" discusses the humiliation associated with being a single mother in Indian society, especially in light of Meera's unwed pregnancy. In order to illustrate the double standards and moral

scrutiny placed on women about their reproductive choices, the film examines the difficulties and social judgments that Meera encounters while navigating her pregnancy without the support of a partner. In spite of the struggles portrayed in the movie, "Kalimannu" shows motherhood as a source of happiness and fulfillment for Meera in the end. The story upholds the conventional belief that mothers derive meaning and purpose from their roles, therefore sustaining the myth that motherhood is the pinnacle of a woman's identity.As the movie progresses, Meera shows herself to be a strong, independent woman who exercises her agency in making decisions about being pregnant and giving birth. She defies the stereotype of women as helpless objects of fate or social expectations by remaining firm in her resolve to embrace motherhood on her own terms, in spite of social pressure and personal obstacles. Critics and viewers gave "Kalimannu" mixed reviews, praising the film for its emotional impact and performances but criticizing it for dealing with sensitive subjects in a provocative way. The movie spurred discussions about gender roles and societal standards as well as topics including surrogacy, single parenthood, and how pregnancy is portrayed on screen.

*5 Sundarikal. :*Five short films featuring women are included in this anthology: Sethulakshmi, Isha, Gauri, Kullante Bharya, and Aami. The film's audacious and experimental themes won it praise from critics. Every woman leads her own life up until strange events cause it to take a turn. In "5 Sundarikal," gender stereotypes are perpetuated by a range of cultural conventions, expectations, and attitudes that specify how men and women should act, what roles they should play, and how they should communicate with one another. Gender stereotypes appear in the movie in the following ways: The movie's protagonists are shown as according to the traditional gender norms, which state that women should typically be relegated to domestic duties and are subservient and passive while males should be forceful, dominant, and the main breadwinners. Through their interactions, dialogue, and actions inside their various social contexts, the characters reinforce these roles.

The objectification and sexualization of women's bodies is another instance of gender stereotyping in action. Male gaze, objects of desire, and physical attractiveness are frequently used to evaluate female characters instead of intelligence or skill. This reinforces the myth that women are essentially made for men to enjoy and consume. The movie draws attention to the fact that men are afforded greater independence and

autonomy than women in terms of gender relations. For instance, although female characters are subject to more criticism and scrutiny for taking identical activities, male characters may act in ways that are viewed as socially acceptable or even praiseworthy, such as following their professional goals or claiming their independence. The movie's characters deal with social pressure to live up to gender stereotypes and expectations. Particularly women experience pressure to put marriage, childbirth, and household responsibilities ahead of their own goals and independence. Women may have fewer options and chances to express themselves outside of stereotypical gender norms as a result of this pressure.

*Trivandram Lodge :*A lodge in Trivandrum, Kerala forms a home for people from different walks of life. Their lives go into a state of tizzy with the entry of Dhwani, a woman who wants to live a sexually progressive life. Her study of the other inmates forms the plot of the movie. It courted controversy because of open discussions surrounding sex and lust.

# CONCLUSION

One of the most progressive states in India is Kerala, which is frequently mentioned as the only place in the nation to have 100% literacy rates and where many women work in formal employment. In Kerala, there is a common saying that reads, "You wear progressive slippers, but leave them at the doorstep." Despite the fact that many women in the state work outside the home, they still end up doing all the household chores.

Similar to numerous other regions across the globe, women typically shoulder the brunt of unpaid caregiving in India. An International Labor Organization research from 2018 states that 312 minutes a day were spent by Indian women in urban areas providing unpaid care. Men completed 29 minutes. Two trustworthy indicators of Kerala's complexity are politics and cinema, two subjects dear to the hearts of typical Malayalis. Popular movies and how they portray women provide an interesting perspective of modern Kerala society, with all of its hopes and anxieties, if popular cinema is any indication of a public conscience.

The New Generation movement, which began in 2010 and is a loosely defined title that is frequently rejected even by certain filmmakers who come under its purview, indicated a change in views. These films broke with the previously uncontested reign of celebrities like Mahmootty and Mohanlal. They were styled in an evocative manner reminiscent of the 1980s, a decade recognized for a parallel wave of cinema that was acclaimed for its critical and economic achievements. The films concentrated on socially relevant issues. The films broke with the long-standing practice of airbrushing by shifting to urban locations, speaking in the lingo unique to the area, and portraying characters as realistically as possible.

Grand, dramatic tales of land, grief, and love broke apart to reveal several, more intimate accounts of regular people struggling with everyday issues. The representation of female leaders was seen to be changing subtly but significantly as the movement gained traction.

Up until recently, female leads in Malayalam films were merely dressed up and forced to dance around trees; today, we see strong female characters. Previously, women were portrayed in these films as either hypersexual, uncontrollable women out to seduce the hero or saintly caregivers.

A cast of actors that includes Parvathy Thiruvoth, Rima Kallingal, Remya Nambeesan, and a younger generation that includes Sajayan, Lekshmi, and Aparna Balamurali, among others, are shaping the aesthetic and political landscape of the new Malayalam female lead. The female characters are bolder, louder, and more direct in both body language and discourse. Furthermore, they are portrayed as common every woman whose interests go beyond the house, hearth, and hero—a dramatic contrast to the often dazzling objects of desire. The characters are brought closer to the spectator by the honest warts-and-all realism on show, which also mirrors the profound and commonplace suffering of being a woman in Kerala. Some characters were meant to offer the man a purpose in his writing.
Mothers needed to be taken care of, wives needed to be protected, sisters needed to be married off, and women who displayed boldness needed to be "taught a lesson."

The investigation of gender stereotyping in Malayalam cinema exposes a nuanced interaction between society beliefs, cultural norms, and representation. Upon conducting a thorough examination of multiple movies, it is apparent that although progress has been made in presenting gender roles in a more complex manner, widespread stereotypes continue to exist and are frequently strengthened by the financial and cultural aspects of the industry.
There were situations in which women are objectified, passive, and confined to traditional, submissive roles. On the other hand, patriarchal notions of masculinity are reinforced when male characters are portrayed as aggressive, dominant, and in control. In addition to limiting the possibilities for storytelling, these representations help to normalize prejudice and gender inequity. Furthermore, the debates around movies like "Oru Adaar Love" and "Queen" demonstrate how much the public is aware of and critical of how women are portrayed in movies. These scandals highlighted crucial discussions about misogyny, consent, and the obligation of filmmakers, but they also highlighted how reluctant the industry is to question accepted wisdom out of concern for potential negative effects on the film business.

Nevertheless, despite these difficulties, there are movies like "The Great Indian Kitchen," "Uyare," and "Vaanku" that, by challenging gender norms and elevating the voices of women, provide a ray of hope. These movies show how cinema has the power to influence and mirror society views on gender, opening doors for more

inclusive stories and a wider range of viewpoints. Examining how they contribute to the maintenance or dismantling of gender stereotypes is crucial for filmmakers, viewers, and industry stakeholders as we traverse the difficult terrain of gender representation in Malayalam cinema. Malayalam cinema has the potential to be a potent force for social change and gender equality if it continues to promote diversity in front of and behind the camera, encourages conversation, and supports storylines that highlight the richness of human experiences.

Our initiative essentially highlights the critical need for a paradigm change in the way that gender is portrayed and understood in Malayalam films. We can develop a cinematic landscape that reflects the richness and complexity of human identities by challenging norms, embracing diversity, and demolishing stereotypes. This will pave the road for a society that is more inclusive and egalitarian.

The director of "The Great Indian Kitchen," and “Kaathal – The Core” Jeo Baby, has become a prominent personality in modern Malayalam film, renowned for his perceptive depictions of social issues and his predilection for delving into themes of male and female emancipation. Even if "The Great Indian Kitchen" is regarded as a landmark picture in his canon, Baby is dedicated to feminism in storytelling in more ways than one.

Jeo Baby has proven throughout his career to have a good understanding of gender relations as well as a willingness to question accepted wisdom and preconceptions. Strong, multifaceted female characters who bravely and tenaciously negotiate the challenges of contemporary life are a common aspect of his films. Jeo Baby's films are distinguished by their careful depictions of the experiences of women and their dedication to elevating the voices of women. His characters challenge conventional norms and forge their own paths, whether by subtly expressing their ideas or making audacious declarations, which prompts viewers to reevaluate deeply held beliefs about gender and power. In addition to providing viewers with entertainment, Jeo Baby's films have prompted significant discussions about gender equality, representation, and societal change. His corpus of work is proof of the cinematic medium's transformative power and its essential role in influencing how we view the world. Jeo Baby is essentially a forerunner in the Malayalam film industry, and his commitment to female narrative has strengthened his position by encouraging both viewers and filmmakers.

A film that every Malayalee should watch, The Great Indian Kitchen is a depiction of the traditional Malayalam patriarchy. The film features candid portrayals of what goes on in bed, which is presumably a chance for parents to have frank conversations with their children about sex. In India, school-based sex education is much needed. As the film gradually draws to a climax, Nimisha escapes from prison by locking her husband and father in the kitchen. This escape is depicted in great detail, and she is elated as she passes by strangers. She is presented as a self-sufficient woman who takes care of herself as the film comes to a finish. The movie makes clear that the "kitchen" is really a metaphor for a bigger jail that is hidden from view and serves as a home for free slaves known as "bahu," from whom there is no way out. Cleaning every area of the house, including the courtyard, sweeping, brooming, washing dishes, grinding spices, fermenting cereals, brewing tea, and wiping down the filthy table left by the father and son, who like to chew their drumsticks in the sambar and spill waste on it. Within the boundaries of an apparently normal household, "The Great Indian Kitchen" explores gender dynamics, patriarchy, and female agency in a profoundly feminist way. Viewed via the feminist viewpoint, the movie offers a potent indictment of the oppressive systems that control women's life in Indian society as well as traditional gender roles.

Fundamentally, "The Great Indian Kitchen" presents a striking image of the difficulties faced by women in the home, emphasizing the monotony, drudgery, and lack of independence they endure on a daily basis. Viewers are forced to confront the harsh reality of marriage expectations, societal pressures, and the erasing of individual identity in the pursuit of marital bliss through the role of the unnamed wife, masterfully portrayed by Nimisha Sajayan.

The exacting attention to detail and accurate depiction of household chores like cooking, cleaning, and serving by director Jeo Baby accentuates the invisible and underappreciated work that women perform in the home. The film highlights the tenacity and power of women in the face of institutional oppression by contrasting these routine activities with silent resistance and moments of quiet rebellion.

Furthermore, by dismantling the patriarchal structure that oversees marriages, "The Great Indian Kitchen" questions conventional ideas of masculinity and gender. The film highlights the ways in which patriarchy damages both men and women by exposing the entitlement, privilege, and entitlement that frequently accompany male privilege through the character of the husband, played by Suraj Venjaramoodu.

Furthermore, the wife's decision to regain her agency and declare her independence in the movie's climax is a potent declaration of female emancipation and empowerment. She represents the bravery and tenacity of women who defy gender stereotypes and society expectations by leaving her abusive marriage and enjoying her newfound independence.

"The Great Indian Kitchen" is essentially a landmark piece of feminist filmmaking that forces audiences to address the systemic injustices and inequalities that still exist in Indian society. The film opens crucial discussions on gender, power, and autonomy by its uncompromising depiction of female oppression and resistance, opening the door for a more inclusive and equal future. Upon contemplating the ideas and lessons presented in "The Great Indian Kitchen," it becomes evident that the movie's influence transcends the screen. It is a call to action for cultural change, a celebration of women's tenacity and resiliency, and a rallying cry for gender equality. We may fight toward a future where every person is free to live their truth and fulfill their full potential by elevating the voices of women, opposing oppressive structures, and promoting social justice.

In Kaathal, Jeo Baby—who made headlines in The Great Indian Kitchen by breaking down a loveless marriage—dissects a different kind of unhappy marriage. As the movie begins, a sensation of weight affects a few of its most important characters. An unclear exchange between a mother and daughter suggests that there may be tension below. But because of the way Mathew, Omana, and a few other key characters conduct themselves, Kaathal is mostly characterized by a quite calm tone. Most of the drama takes place inside. Jeo doesn't go back to any of the characters' traumatic experiences. This scenario is also intriguing since it raises issues related to walking the talk and gradations of progressiveness, among other things. A few members fear that they will lose votes as a result of what they perceive to be a "scandal." Is it, however, scandalous? Without the involvement of the courts, the church, the state, and, of course, the court of public opinion, a story like this would not have been complete. A less talented director would have likely chosen a more overtly dramatic tone, but Jeo Baby's direction has shown time and time again that his abilities are in subtly expressing complex issues. A noticeable deficiency of self-reliant female protagonists can be found in most Malayalam films. This is true even though a few of the movies have strong female leads and emphasize the experiences of women. This is

explained by the fact that traditional gender roles are the main focus of Malayalam cinema, which is still predominantly patriarchal in character. In Malayalam movie, female characters are typically depicted as conventional, obedient, and subservient. Women are frequently portrayed as moms, wives, or daughters, and it is expected of them to fulfill these responsibilities. Seldom are these individuals presented as autonomous, self-assured, or questioning the existing quo.

In conclusion, there has been a discernible change in the representation of women in Malayalam cinema throughout time, with female characters now exhibiting more depth and agency and eschewing traditional roles. However, there is still a long way to go in this area before gender equality is realized. Women are still underrepresented in critical creative fields, and the roles women play in movies and television shows are often limited and shaped by antiquated preconceptions. The detrimental impacts that these portrayals have on society make it necessary for the industry to act to address these issues. By promoting greater gender diversity behind the camera and offering more nuanced and truthful depictions of female characters, Malayalam film may play a vital role in shattering gender stereotypes and influencing public attitudes towards gender equality. The industry needs to understand the importance of gender representation and equality as a natural demand as well as a social duty. Since this makes women more visible, we need to see more subtly depicted as independent in order to gradually move away from women's subservient roles in society.

A huge shout-out to Jeo Baby and the whole crew for both movies since they gave us a much-needed wake-up call.

We deserve it.

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